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WHEN KNIGHTHOOD WAS IN FLOWER

Or, The Love Story of Charles Brandon and Mary Tudor, the King's Sister, and Happening in the Reign of His August Majesty King Henry the Eighth

By EDWIN CASKODEN [CHARLES MAJOR]

CHAPTER IX.

PUT NOT YOUR TRUST IN PRINCESSES.

THOUGHT the king's dance that night would never end, so fond were the Frenchmen of our fair ladies, and I was more than anxious to see Brandon and learn the issue of the girls' escapade, as I well knew the danger attending it.

All things, however, must end, so early in the morning I hastened to our rooms, where I found Brandon lying in his clothes, everything saturated with blood from a dozen sword cuts. He was very weak, and I at once had in a barber, who took off his shirt of mail and dressed his wounds. He then dropped into a deep sleep, while I watched the night out. Upon awakening Brandon told me all that had happened, but asked me to say nothing of his illness, as he wished to keep the fact of his wounds secret in order that he might better conceal the cause of them. But, as I told you, he did not speak of Buckingham's part in the affair.

I saw the princess that afternoon and expected, of course, she would inquire for her defender. One who had given such timely help and who was suffering so much on her account was surely worth a little solicitude, but not a word did she ask. She did not come near me, but made a point of avoidance, as I could plainly see. The next morning she, with Jane, went over to Scotland palace without so much as a breath of inquiry from either of them. This heartless conduct enraged me, but I was glad to learn afterward that Jane's silence was at Mary's command, that bundle of selfishness fearing that any solicitude, however carefully shown, upon her part might reveal her secret.

It seems that Mary had recent intelligence of the forward state of affairs in the marriage negotiations and felt that a discovery by her brother of what she had done, especially in view of the disastrous results, would send her to France despite all the coaxing she could do from then till doomsday.

It was a terrible fate hanging over her, doubly so in view of the fact that she loved another man, and looking back at it all from the vantage point of time I cannot wonder that it drove other things out of her head and made her seem selfish in her frightened desire to save herself.

About 12 o'clock of the following night I was awakened by a knock at my door, and upon opening in walked a sergeant of the sheriff of London, with four yeomen at his heels.

The sergeant asked if one Charles Brandon was present, and upon my affirmative answer demanded that he be forthcoming. I told the sergeant that Brandon was confined to his bed with illness, whereupon he asked to be shown to his room.

It was useless to resist or to evade, so I awakened Brandon and took the sergeant in. Here he read his warrant to arrest Charles Brandon, Esq., for the murder of two citizens of London, perpetrated, done and committed upon the night of such and such a day of this year of our Lord 1514. Brandon's hat had been found by the side of the dead men, and the authorities had received information from a high source that Brandon was the guilty person. That high source was evidently Buckingham.

When the sergeant found Brandon covered with wounds, there was no longer any doubt, and although hardly able to lift his hand, he was forced to dress and go with them. A horse litter was procured, and we all started to London.

While Brandon was dressing I said I would at once go and awaken the king, who, I knew, would pardon the offense when he heard my story, but Brandon asked the sergeant to leave us to ourselves for a short time, and closed the door.

"Please do nothing of the sort, Caskoden," said he. "If you tell the king, I will declare there is not one word of truth in your story. There is only one person in the world who may tell of that night's happenings, and if she does not they shall remain untold. She will make it all right at once, I know. I would not do her the foul wrong to think for one instant that she will fail. You do not know her. She sometimes seems selfish, but it is thoughtlessness fostered by flattery, and her heart is right. I would trust her with my life. If you breathe a word of what I have told you, you may do more harm than you can ever remedy, and I ask you to say nothing to any one. If the princess would not liberate me—but that is not to be thought of. Never doubt that she can and will do it better than you think. She is all gold."

This, of course, silenced me, as I did not know what new danger I might create or how I might mar the matter I so much wished to mend. I did not tell Brandon that the girls had left Greenwich or of my undefined and perhaps unfounded fear that Mary might not act as he thought she would in a great emergency, but silently helped him to dress and went to London along with him and the sheriff's sergeant.

Brandon was taken to Newgate, the most loathsome prison in London at that time, it being used for felons, while Ludgate was for debtors. Here he was

almost dead from loss of blood, spilled that you might be saved from worse than death, is now lying in a rayless dungeon, a place of frightful filth, such as you would not walk across for all the wealth of London bridge; is surrounded by loathsome, creeping things that would sicken you but to think of; is resting under a charge whose penalty is that he be hanged, drawn and quartered? And yet you stop to eat and bathe and dress! In God's name, Mary Tudor, of what stuff are you made? If he had waited but one little minute, had stopped for the drawing of a breath, had held back for but one faltering thought from the terrible odds of four swords to one, what would you now be? Think, princess; think!"

I was a little frightened at the length to which my feeling had driven me, but Mary took it all very well and said slowly and absentmindedly:

"You are right. I will go at once. I despise my selfish neglect. There is no other way—I have racked my brain—there is no other way. It must be done, and I will go at once and do it."

"And I will go with you," said I.

"I do not blame you," she said, "for doubting me since I have failed once. But you need not doubt me now. It shall be done, and without delay, regardless of the cost to me. I have thought and thought to find some other way to liberate him, but there is none. I will go this instant."

"And I will go with you, Lady Mary," said I doggedly.

She smiled at my persistency and took me by the hand, saying, "Come!"

We at once went off to find the king, but the smile had faded from Mary's face, and she looked as if she were going to execution. Every shade of color had fled, and her lips were the hue of ashes.

We found the king in the midst of his council, with the French ambassadors, discussing the all absorbing topic of the marriage treaty, and Henry, fearing an outbreak, refused to see the princess. As usual, opposition but spurred her determination, so she sat down in the anteroom and said she would not stir until she had seen the king.

After we had waited a few minutes one of the king's pages came up and said he had been looking all over the palace for me and that the king desired my presence immediately. I went in with the page to the king, leaving Mary alone and very melancholy in the antechamber.

Upon entering the king's presence he asked: "Where have you been, Sir Edwin? I have almost killed a good half dozen pages hunting you. I want you to prepare immediately to go to Paris with an embassy to his majesty King Louis. You will be the interpreter. The ambassador you need not know. Make ready at once. The embassy will leave London from the Tabard inn one hour hence."

Could a command to duty have come at a more inopportune time? I was distracted, and upon leaving the king went at once to seek the Lady Mary where I had left her in the anteroom. She had gone, so I went to her apartments, but could not find her. I went to the queen's salon, but she was not there, and I traversed that old rambling palace from one end to the other without finding her or Lady Jane.

The king had told me the embassy would be a secret one, and that I was to speak of it to nobody, least of all to the Lady Mary. No one was to know that I was leaving England, and I was to communicate with no one at home while in France.

The king's command was not to be disobeyed. To do so would be as much as my life was worth; but, besides that, the command of the king I served was my highest duty, and no Caskoden ever failed in that. I may not be as tall as some men, but my fidelity and honor—but you will say I boast.

I was to make ready my bundle and ride six miles to London in one hour, and almost half that time was spent already. I was sure to be late, so I could not waste another minute.

I went to my room and got together a few things necessary for my journey, but did not take much in the way of clothing, preferring to buy that new in Paris, where I could find the latest styles in pattern and fabric.

I tried to assure myself that Mary would see the king at once and tell him all and not allow my dear friend Brandon to lie in that terrible place another night, yet a persistent fear gnawed at my heart, and a sort of intuition that seemed to have the very breath of certainty in its foreboding made me doubt her.

As I could find neither Mary nor Jane, I did the next best thing—I wrote a letter to each of them, urging immediate action and left them to be delivered by my man Thomas, who was one of those trusty souls that never fail. I did not tell the girls I was about to start for France, but intimated that I was compelled to leave London for a time and said, "I leave the fate of this man, to whom we all owe so much, in your hands, knowing full well how tender you will be of him."

I was away from home nearly a month, and as I dared not write, and even Jane did not know where I was, I did not receive nor expect any letters. The king had ordered secrecy, and if I have mingled with all my faults a single virtue it is that of faithfulness to my trust. So I had no news from England and sent none home.

During all that time the same old fear lived in my heart that Mary might fail to liberate Brandon. She knew of the negotiations concerning the French marriage, as we all did, although only by an indefinite sort of hearsay, and I was sure the half-founded rumors had reached her ears had long since become certainties and that her heart was full of trouble and fear of her violent brother. She would certainly be at her coaxing and wheedling again and on her best behavior, and I feared she might refrain from telling Henry of her trip to Grouche's, knowing how severe he was in such matters and how furious he was sure to become at the discovery. I was certain it was this fear which had prevented Mary from going directly to the king on our return to Greenwich from Scotland palace, and I knew that her eating, bathing and dressing were but an excuse for a breathing spell before the dreaded interview.

This fear remained with me all the time I was away, but when I reasoned with myself I would smother it as well as I could with argumentative attempts at self assurance. I would say over and over to myself that Mary could not fail and that even if she did there was Jane—dear, sweet, thoughtful, unselfish Jane!—who would not allow her to do so. But, as far as they go, our feelings—our "feelings," as we call them—are worth all the logic in the world, and you may say what you will, but my presentiments—I speak for no one else—are well to be minded. There

is another sense hidden about us that will develop as the race grows older. I speak to posterity.

In proof of this statement I now tell you that when I returned to London I found Brandon still in the terrible dungeon, and, worse still, he had been tried for murder and had been condemned to be hanged, drawn and quartered on the second Friday following. Hanged! Drawn! Quartered! It is time we were doing away with such barbarity.

We will now go back a month for the purpose of looking up the doings of a friend of ours, his grace the Duke of Buckingham.

On the morning after the fatal battle of Billingsgate the barber who had treated Brandon's wounds had been called to London to dress a bruised knee for his grace the duke. In the course of the operation an immense deal of information oozed out of the barber, one item of which was that he had the night before dressed nine wounds, great and small, for Master Brandon, the king's friend. This established the identity of the man who had rescued the girls, a fact of which Buckingham had had his suspicions all along. So Brandon's arrest followed, as I have already related to you.

I afterward learned from various sources how this nobleman began to avenge his mishap with Brandon at Mary's ball when the latter broke his sword point. First he went to Newgate and gave orders to the keeper, who was his tool, to allow no communication with the prisoner, and it was by his instructions that Brandon had been confined in the worst dungeon in London. Then he went down to Greenwich to take care of matters there, knowing that the king would learn of Brandon's arrest and probably take steps for his liberation at once.

The king had just heard of the arrest when Buckingham arrived, and the latter found he was right in his surmise that his majesty would at once demand Brandon's release.

When the duke entered the king's room, Henry called to him: "My lord, you are opportunely arrived. So good a friend of the people of London can help us greatly this morning. Our friend Brandon has been arrested for the killing of two men night before last in Billingsgate ward. I am sure there is some mistake and that the good sheriff has the wrong man, but right or wrong, we want him out and ask your good offices."

"I shall be most happy to serve your majesty and will go to London at once to see the lord mayor."

In the afternoon the duke returned and had a private audience with the king.

"I did as your majesty requested in regard to Brandon's release," he said, "but on investigation I thought it best to consult you again before proceeding further. I fear there is no doubt that Brandon is the right man. It seems he was out with a couple of venches concerning whom he got into trouble and stabbed two men in the back. It is a very aggravated case, and the citizens are much incensed about it, owing partly to the fact that such occurrences have been so frequent of late. I thought under the circumstances and in view of the fact that your majesty will soon call upon the city for a loan to make up the Lady Mary's dowry it would be wise not to antagonize them in this matter, but to allow Master Brandon to remain quietly in confinement until the loan is completed, and then we can snap our fingers at them."

"We will snap our fingers at the scurvy burghers now and have the loan, too," returned Henry angrily. "I want Brandon liberated at once, and I shall expect another report from you immediately, my lord."

Buckingham felt that his revenge had slipped through his fingers this time, but he was patient where evil was to be accomplished and could wait. Then it was that the council was called during the progress of which Mary and I had tried to obtain an audience of the king.

Buckingham had gone to pay his respects to the queen and on his way back had espied Mary waiting for the king in the anteroom and went to her.

At first she was irritated at the sight of this man, whom she so despised, but a thought came to her that she might make use of him. She knew his power with the citizens and city authorities of London and also knew, or thought she knew, that a smile from her could accomplish everything with him. She had ample evidence of his infatuation, and she hoped that she could procure Brandon's liberty through Buckingham without revealing her dangerous secret.

Much to the duke's surprise, she smiled upon him and gave a cordial welcome, saying: "My lord, you have been unkind to us of late and have not shown us the light of your countenance. I am glad to see you once more. Tell me the news."

"I cannot say there is much of interest. I have learned the new dance from Caskoden, if that is news, and hope for a favor at our next ball from the fairest lady in the world."

"And quite welcome," returned Mary, complacently appropriating the title, "and welcome to more than one, I hope, my lord."

This graciousness would have looked suspicious to one with less vanity than Buckingham, but he saw no craft in it. He did see, however, that Mary did not know who had attacked her in Billingsgate, and he felt greatly relieved.

The duke smiled and smirked and was enchanted at her kindness. They walked down the corridor, talking and laughing, Mary awaiting an opportunity to put the important question without exciting suspicion. At last it came, when Buckingham, half inquiringly, expressed his surprise that Mary should be found sitting at the king's door.

"I am waiting to see the king," said she. "Little Caskoden's friend, Brandon, has been arrested for a brawl of some sort over in London, and Sir Edwin and Lady Jane have importuned me to obtain his release, which I have promised to do. Perhaps your grace will allow me to petition you in place of carrying my request to the king. You are quite as powerful as his majesty in London, and I should like to ask you to obtain for Master Brandon his liberty at once. I shall hold myself infinitely obliged if your lordship will do this for me." She smiled upon him her sweetest smile and assumed an indifference that would have deceived any one but Buckingham. Upon him under the circumstances it was worse than wasted. Buckingham at once consented and said that notwithstanding the fact that he did not like Brandon, to oblige her highness he would undertake to befriend a much more disagreeable person.

"I fear," he said, "it will have to be done secretly—by conniving at his es-

cape rather than by an order for his release. The citizens are greatly aroused over the alarming frequency of such occurrences, and as many of the offenders have lately escaped punishment by reason of court interference I fear this man Brandon will have to bear the brunt, in the London mind, of all these unpunished crimes. It will be next to impossible to liberate him except by arranging privately with the keeper for his escape. He could go down into the country and wait in seclusion until it is all blown over or until London has a new victim, and then an order can be made pardoning him, and he can return."

"Pardoning him! What are you talking of, my lord? He has done nothing to be pardoned for. He should be and shall be rewarded." Mary spoke impetuously, but caught herself and tried to remedy her blunder. "That is, if I have heard the straight of it. I have been told that the killing was done in the defense of two—women." Think of this poor, unconscious girl, so full of grief and trouble, talking thus to Buckingham, who knew so much more about the affair than even she who had taken so active a part in it!

"Who told you of it?" asked the duke.

Mary saw she had made a mistake and, after hesitating for a moment, answered: "Sir Edwin Caskoden. He had it from Master Brandon, I suppose." Rather adroit this was, but equidistant from both truth and effectiveness.

"I will go at once to London and arrange for Brandon's escape," said Buckingham, preparing to leave. "But you must not divulge the fact that I do it. It would cost me all the favor I enjoy with the people of London, though I would willingly lose that favor a thousand times over for a smile from you."

She gave the smile, and as he left followed his retiring figure with her eyes and thought, "After all, he has a kind heart."

She breathed a sigh of relief, too, for she felt she had accomplished Brandon's release and still retained her dangerous secret, the divulging of which she feared would harden Henry's heart against her blandishments and strand her upon the throne of France.

But she was not entirely satisfied with the arrangement. She knew that her obligation to Brandon was such as to demand of her that she should not leave the matter of his release to any other person, much less to an enemy such as Buckingham. Yet the cost of his freedom by a direct act of her own would be so great that she was tempted to take whatever risk there might be in the way that had opened itself to her. Not that she would not have made the sacrifice willingly or would not have told Henry all if that were the only chance to save Brandon's life, but the other way, the one she had tak-



Here he read his warrant to arrest Charles Brandon, Esq.